

HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

DES RAJ BAJWA

*Professor, Higher Education Commission, Government P.G. College,
Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra, Ambala, Haryana, India*

ABSTRACT

In India, the higher education scene has swiftly evolved, especially in the past two decades. This rapid progress has been primarily attributed to the various initiatives, undertaken by the private sector. However, these advancements have also been a matter of concern, regarding their standard and exploitation. The government has been repeatedly contradictory and inconsistent, in defining the role of private sector in higher education. Such an approach has resulted in chaotic and unplanned growth. The attempts to uphold standards and check exploitation, by the regulatory bodies have proved futile. Nevertheless, the system is responsible for the numerous formidable entry barriers, which have resulted in underside results. Private players in the education sector are reluctant to undergo voluntary accreditation, and are therefore, pointless for its stakeholders.

Since independence, the higher education system in India has escalated new heights. [1] By 1980 itself, the number of universities and colleges in the country grew to 132 and 4738, respectively. These institutions catered to around five percent of the eligible age group population. Today, it has grown by leaps and bounds. In terms of enrollment alone, India ranks third in the world (after China and the USA). India ranks first, with regard to the number of institutions, with 348 universities and 17625 colleges.

The types of universities and colleges catering to higher education, vary with the country. The variation may be academic, administrative or financial. Universities are permitted under an Act of Parliament (central universities), or by the state legislatures (state universities). In addition, a few higher education institutions are granted the 'deemed university' status, by the central government, through gazette notifications. The Parliament/state legislatures may also designate certain institutions, as having national importance. However, all these institutes of higher learning are permitted to grant degrees.

The higher education system in India, has developed in a chaotic and unplanned manner. The drive to make higher education, socially inclusive has led to a sudden and dramatic increase, in numbers of institutions without a proportionate increase in material and intellectual resources. This has resulted in a drop in academic standards. In addition, there is an inadequacy with regard to infrastructure and facilities. Higher education institutions, have large vacancies in faculty positions, employ poor faculty and use outmoded teaching methods. This has resulted in declining research standards, unmotivated students, overcrowded classrooms and widespread geographic, income, gender and ethnic divides. Most institutions do not receive financial support, from either the government or the society. This is more, so among colleges established in rural areas, as they are non-viable, are under-enrolled, have poor infrastructure and facilities and employ only a few teachers. The system of higher education has met further impediments within its regulatory framework. The much debated and controversial move of privatization of higher educational institutions, has also been a stumbling block to its flourishing. These fundamental concerns are identified and addressed in the paper.

KEYWORDS: Higher Education & India

Received: Jul 30, 2017; **Accepted:** Aug 18, 2017; **Published:** Sep 11, 2017; **Paper Id.:** IJBMROCT20172

INTRODUCTION

Research Methodology

Aims and Objectives

The primary concerns and problems pertaining to the system of higher education in India, have been identified and form the core objective of this study. The researcher has confined the scope of this paper, to three main concerns relating to higher education viz., the present regulatory framework, privatization and funding and financing. The paper assesses numerous arguments, cases and recommendations, to emphasize the importance of diverse issues.

Scope and Limitations

The scope of this paper is restricted to the recognition and study of the primary concerns, pertaining to the Indian higher education system.

Mode of Citation

A uniform mode of citation is used throughout the paper.

Sources of Data

Research amassed from various articles, working papers, statistical data and case laws was the core of this paper.

Research Questions

This paper seeks to focus on the following

- What are the primary concerns and problems pertaining to higher education in India?
- Why is the prevailing regulatory system an impediment, for the growth and development of higher education in the country?
- What is the role of student loans, in promoting higher education and making it more accessible?
- How can the concerns addressed in the paper be tackled, to sort out the prevailing conflicts in higher education?

Chapterization

The paper is broadly divided into three chapters

Chapter 1: The complications with the prevailing regulatory framework are acknowledged, with a discussion on the suggestions of various committees.

Chapter 2: The concerns pertaining to of the privatization of higher education in India has been addressed.

Chapter 3: The decline in public expenditure on higher education and the inextricable link between the current regulations and funding/finances of educational institutions is assessed.

CONCLUSIONS

The regulation of higher education by the government is a theme of various acrimonious debates across the policy spectrum. Its advocates credit regulations as indispensable, for maintaining the quality of education. They argue that, in the absence of regulation, profit maximization would be the primary role of private education institutions, and this could result

in the shift of focus from education. They continue to justify government intervention, to improve the abysmal quality of most private institutions, notwithstanding the stifling regulations imposed down the years. The State continues to be accountable for all holdups, faced by those who avail higher education, and are bound to safeguard the student's interests.

India's education regulators have failed to motivate quality in private centers of higher learning. Such a scenario, of state domination of higher education, has generated an artificial dearth in facilities. This in turn is the cause for an acute supply-demand disparity. The demand for higher educational institutions, results in the increasing number of higher educational institutions. The regulatory process is highly politicized, especially with most private colleges being owned by politicians or well-connected business establishments. The quality of such institutions and government regulations exist in a proportional trend, with poor quality of institutions, resulting in stronger government impositions. However, it must be borne in mind that, such a state of affairs exists despite high entry barriers imposed, which were apparently created to improve quality of such institutions, which thrive in the first place. Although, the regulatory bodies are meant to guard the portals of higher education, and are delegated the responsibility of ensuring adherence to the minimum guidelines by existing institutions, these criteria have usually remained unmet. The regulatory system, in its current form, is simply creating entry-level barriers, rather than smoothening out the imbalances.

Regulation, therefore, should be coordinated, well-designed and systematically researched, to assess its significance, requirement, practical limitations and market realities. While adopting and understanding the aspects of regulations for higher education, it is essential to regard the primary objective: enhancing growth of educational institutions rather than restrictions. The higher education sector offers a wide range of subjects and, as with continuing education, it needs to be demand driven. Higher education has been operated nonchalantly in India, in the past few decades. There has been no creativity or purpose in its drive. Furthermore, accreditation continues to be cumbersome and a strenuous bureaucratic exercise, rather than serving any true purpose. Although, the regulator needs to check the growth of bogus or poor-quality colleges, in India, the University Authorities do not have a proper monitoring and surveillance system for colleges. This inadequacy is major grounds, for the rising incidents of sudden de-recognition, as was noted in the case of Chhattisgarh University, as well as a large number of affiliated colleges. Such episodes are distressing for a large number of students.

Another important measure, to embark on it is that of decentralization. Decentralization intends to eradicate, or reduce the cumbersomeness and incompetence, in the system. The primary agenda is to transform the high costs per unit into lower costs and, thereby, replace diseconomies of scale. Without decentralization, the purpose of new techniques proves futile. This has already been demonstrated, by the over expanded monolithic system, which does not foster improvement.

REFERENCES

1. *Assessment and Accreditation in Higher Education* (New Delhi: Association of Indian Universities 2004)
2. *Decentralization of Higher Education System* (New Delhi: Association of Indian Universities 1991)
3. *Reforms and Innovations in Higher Education* (New Delhi: Association of Indian Universities 2001)
4. A. Singh, "Challenges in Higher Education," *Economic and Political Weekly*, May 22, 2004, pp 2155-2158.
5. C. Premisa, "Higher Education in India : From Socialism to Capitalism"
6. www.legalserviceindia.com/articles/he.htm

7. D. Kapur, P. Mehta, "Indian Higher Education Reform: From Half Baked Socialism to Half Baked Capitalism", (CID Working Paper No. 108), Cambridge, MA: Centre for International Development at Harvard University, 2004.
8. www.cid.harvard.edu/cidwp/pdf/108.pdf
9. H. Weiler, "Higher Education in India: Critical Issues", Stanford University
10. www.stanford.edu/~Weller/Tests07/Notes_on_Indian_Higher_Education.pdf
11. J. Tilak., "Absence of Policy and Perspective on Higher Education", *Economic and Political Weekly*, May 22, 2004, pp 2159-2164.
12. J. Tilak, "Student Loans in Financing Higher Education in India", *Higher Education*, 24 (04), June 1992, pp 289-404.
13. N. Jayaram, "Higher Education Reform in India: Prospects and Challenges".
14. www.cshe.nagoya-u.ac.in/seminor/kokusai/jayaram.pdf
15. P. Agarwal, "Higher Education in India: The Need for Change", Working paper No. 180, New Delhi: Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, June 2006.
16. P. Mehta, "Three-Part Series on Regulating Indian Higher Education: Part II: Critiquing the Regulatory Regime, " July 15, 2005.
17. www.indianexpress.com/storyOld.php?storyld=74416
18. P. Nair, D. Kumar, "The Financing of Higher Education: A Broader View", *ICFAI Journal of Infrastructure*, 03 (04), June 2004, pp 21-34.
19. P. Rani, "Economic Reforms and Financing Higher Education in India "National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, 2003.
20. www.ijeb.com/issues/data/june04_6_eraheii.pdf
21. "Regulations of Higher Education in India" CUTS Centre for Competition, Investment and Economic Regulation"
22. www.cutsinternational.org/pdf/Regulation_Higher_Education_in_india_pdf
23. S. Kaul, "Funding Higher Education in India: Seizing the Opportunity," Working Paper No. 179, Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, New Delhi, May 2006.
24. S. Sharma, "Higher Education: Recent Reform Initiatives in India".
25. www.napsipag-research.org/pdf/SUMAN-SHARMA.pdf